



## OFFICIAL MEDIA RELEASE

### KENT COUNTY SHERIFF DEPARTMENT



Date: November 12, 2014

Type of Incident: Citizen Recognition

Supervisor Approval: Lt David Kok

On Thursday, November 13, 2014, at 6:30 PM, the Kent County Sheriff Department will be recognizing two volunteer Victim Advocates and two county residents by presenting them with Public Service Awards and Letters of Appreciation.

This recognition is for their exceptional efforts and kindness in aiding a spouse after the death of her husband in an ultra-light plane crash this summer. The details are described below.

Please join us as we recognize these community members and celebrate the graduation of our Citizen's Police Academy. Your coverage of this event will be greatly appreciated.

**Thursday, November 13, 2014 @ 6:30 PM**

**Kent County Sheriff Department  
701 Ball Ave NE – 5<sup>th</sup> Floor Conference Room**

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On August 24, 2014 Victims Advocates Jay Groendyke and Charles Roetman were called to assist on a Fatal Airplane (Ultra-Light) Crash located at 7360 Lincoln Lake Ave in Vergennes Township.

Once at the scene of the crash, the Victim Advocates were introduced to the wife of the deceased pilot, Mrs. Delia Bowker. Delia and her deceased husband Bryan drove their motor home from New Mexico to Lowell, Michigan for the sole purpose of purchasing this ultralight aircraft. They had no family or friends anywhere in the State of Michigan. Delia was born and raised in the Philippines and spoke broken English which made it extremely difficult for the Victim Advocates to communicate with her. Delia was exhibiting a high level of distress, grief, anger and anxiety over what had just taken place, as she was a witness to the accident as well. Jay and Charles were comforting and assisting Delia and within a short period of time a local couple, Ron and Mavee Blain stopped by, asking if they could help in anyway. Mrs. Blain was also born and raised in the Philippines offered to translate between the victim advocates and Delia. This was an overwhelmingly generous gesture and a much needed miracle for everyone involved.

Jay and Charles worked tirelessly over the next several hours gathering information from the Deputies on scene, while they worked at keeping the Media away from the grieving spouse. They also comforted the owner of the aircraft, Mr. Paul Nichols who was showing extreme grief over the unfortunate accident. Jay and Charles assisted with arrangements for funeral homes in

Grand Rapids and New Mexico. They called several of Bryan and Delia's friends, informing them of the tragic accident. Arrangements were made for Mr. Joe Schwaegel, friends of Bryan and Delia, to fly into Grand Rapids the following day.

Following their generous offer, Mrs. Bowker agreed to stay with Mr. and Mrs. Blain, until friends from New Mexico arrived the following day. Victim Advocates Jay and Charles drove the Bowker's motor home, trailer and dog to the Blain home, as Mrs. Bowker was unable to drive the motor home herself. Jay and Charles then facilitated a gathering where all involved continued to support and comfort Delia.

The next day, Victim Advocates Jay and Charles met the Blains and Delia at the Gerald R. Ford Airport to pick up the friends arriving from New Mexico. Information, comfort and resources were shared over dinner with all involved. The Blains once again opened their home to Delia and her friends; they accepted the invitation and were very appreciative of the generous hospitality.

Kent County Victim Advocates Mr. Jay Groendyke and Mr. Charles Roetman went above and beyond the traditional expectations of the role of victim advocate. They provided compassionate and professional care for Mrs. Bowker, spending in excess of thirty hours with Mrs. Bowker over a three day period following the tragic event. During the three day period Jay and Charles unselfishly placed the needs of Mrs. Bowker ahead of their own lives and responsibilities.

Mr. and Mrs. Blain opened their hearts and their home to a complete stranger, who was in great distress, for three days and two nights providing care and comfort to her. Their unselfish kindness was not only a comfort to Mrs. Bowker, but a source of great relief to our victim advocates, knowing that someone was watching over Mrs. Bowker, grieving so far away from home.